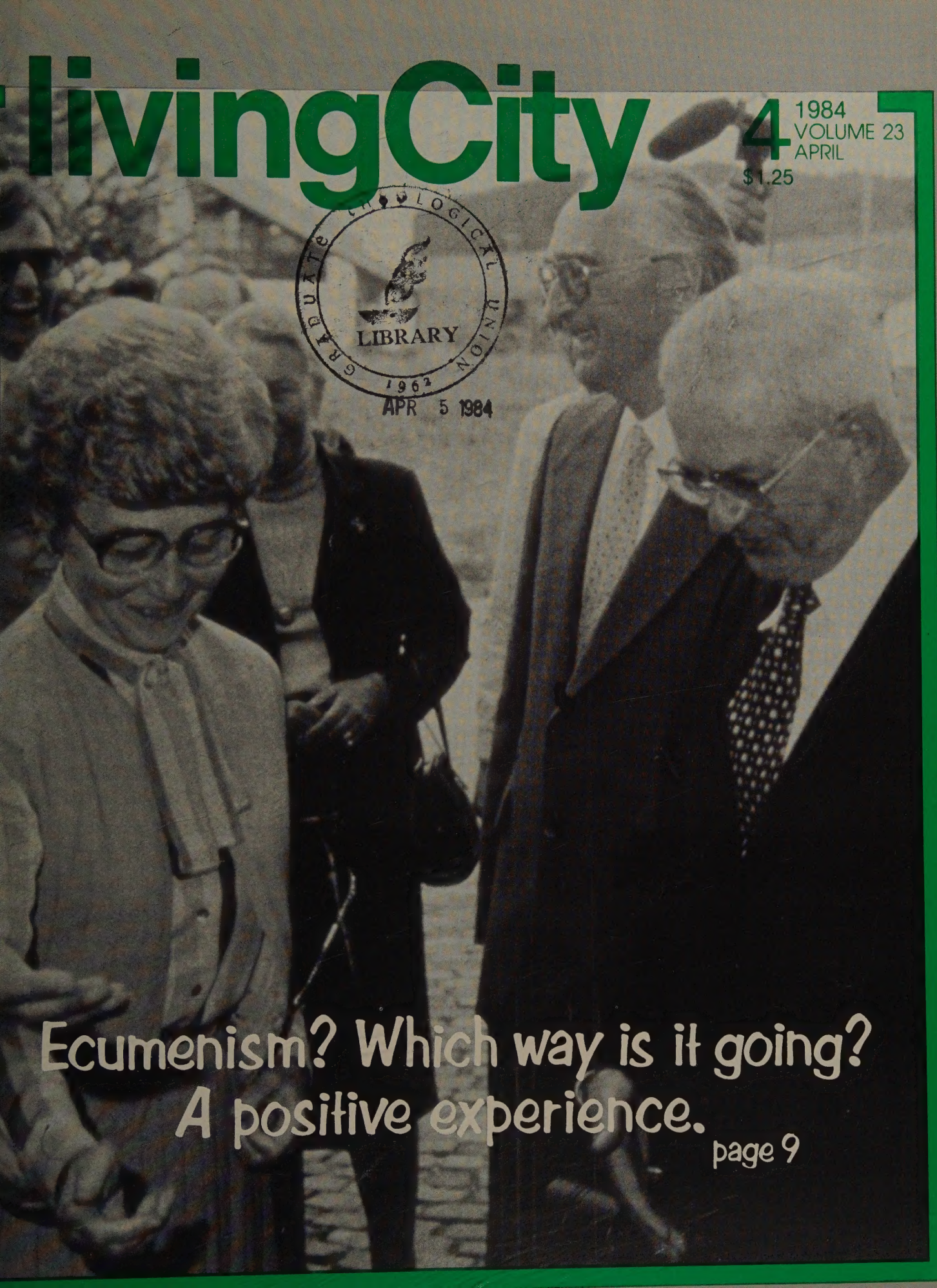
livingCity

4 1984
VOLUME 23
APRIL
$1.25

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY
1962
APR 5 1984



Ecumenism? Which way is it going?

A positive experience.

page 9

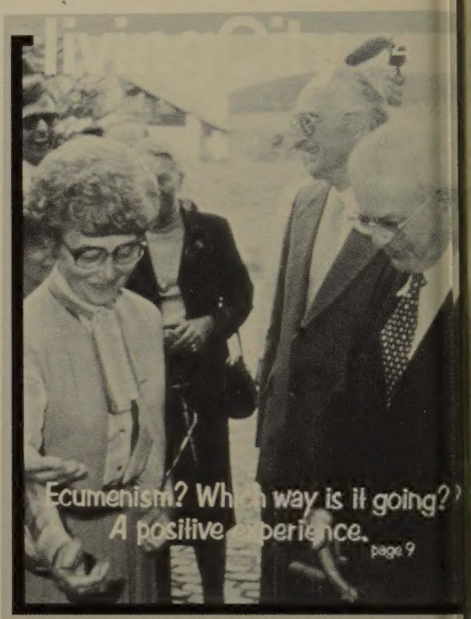
4 1984 VOLUME 23 APRIL

livingCity

2 *40 YEARS AGO—THE BEGINNING: An interview with Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement.*

9 *33 YEARS OF ECUMENICAL DI LOGUE: Milestones of ecumenical expe ence of the Focolare Movement in Germa*

Sharry Silvi	**Editor**
Anne Lingley	**Managing Editor**
Lucy Comolli	**Art Director**
Joseph Klock *Patricia Dreveny* *Gail Giacobbe*	**Contributing Editors**
James and Kathy Webber	**Article Editors**
Vera Giannini	**Senior Copy Editor**
Richard Tetreau *Rosalyn Richardson-Coleman*	**Copy Editors**
Longina Briones	**Assistant Art Director**
Philomena Sheridan	**Circulation Manager**
Rolf F. Rehe	**Art Consultant**



Living City is published 11 times a year (10 monthly and a bimonthly issue in August-September) by the Focolare Movement, a non-profit corporation, P. O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.

Subscription prices for one year: USA and possessions: US$12.75; Canada: US$15.00; Elsewhere: US$18.00; Air Mail (all countries): US$25.00.

An envelope is enclosed in each magazine for subscription orders and inquiries: LIVING CITY, P. O. Box 126, Jamaica, NY 11415.

©1984 by the Focolare Movement, Women's Branch, Inc. All rights reserved.

Cover: Chiara Lubich and Lutheran Bish Dietzfelbinger at the Ecumenical Life Cen in Ottmaring, West Germany.

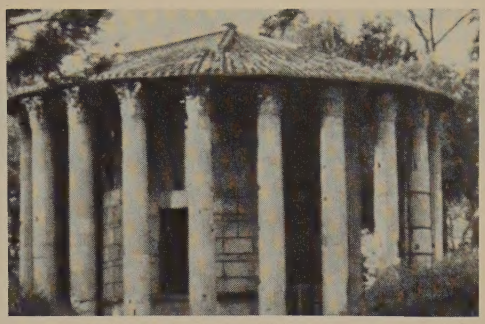
OTHER EDITIONS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT MAGAZINE

CHINESE: "San Sing Seung Yuet Hong" - 70 Wate loo Road 11 B/F - Kowloon - Hong Kong

DUTCH: "Nieuwe Stad" - St. Stephanusstraat 1 - Nijmegen - Holland

"DO NOT BE AFRAID PINA, WE WILL DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER.": An experience of life.

22 *MONTHLY WORD OF LIFE.*



26 *THE EARLY CHURCH: Iranaeus and the Church in Gaul.*

CONTENTS

	FORTY YEARS AGO— THE BEGINNING	2
Enzo Maria Fondi	THIRTY-THREE YEARS OF ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT IN GERMANY	9
Annamaria Pericoli	"DO NOT BE AFRAID PINA, WE WILL DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER"	16
	EASTER '84	20
Silvano Cola	IRENAEUS, THE FIRST "THEOLOGIAN"	26

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

WORD OF LIFE	22
EXPERIENCES OF LIFE	23
FROM THE TEACHER'S DESK Keeping things "in order"	24
YOUTH AND THE GOSPEL	25

RENCH:
"Nouvelle Cité" - 131, rue Castagnary F75 015
ris - France
"Nouvelle Cité" - C.P. 636 - St. Jerome - P. Q. -
nada - J7Z 5T9

ERMAN: "Neue Stadt" - Gleissnerstrasse 87 -
000 Munchen 83 - Germany

ITALIAN: "Città Nuova" - Via degli Scipioni 265
00192 Rome - Italy

PORTUGUESE: "Cidade Nova" - Rua Pio XII 274 -
Paraiso, Sao Paulo - Brazil

SPANISH:
1. "Ciudad Nueva" - Av. da Rivadavia 4939 - Buenos Aires 24 - Argentina
2. "Ciudad Nueva" - Ferrer del Rio - 1 esc A, 2º 5a
Madrid - Spain

OTHER ENGLISH EDITIONS:
1. "New City" - 57 Twyford Avenue - London W3 - England
2. "New City" - P. O. Box 332 - Manila, Philippines
3. "New City" - 367 Balwyn Rd. - Balwyn North 3104 - Australia

40 YEARS AGO THE BEGINNING

The following interview with Chiara Lubich the founder of the Focolare Movement was made by the Vatican Radio and broadcast on December 26, 1983.

Chiara, you opened the first "focolare house" in 1944. What were you thinking at that time? Did you foresee such a vast and widespread movement?

I should make one thing clear, though, that I was not the one to open the first "focolare house" in 1944; it happened because of circumstances. On May 13 that year the city of Trent was bombed for the first time during the war. I left with my family to seek refuge in the woods, on a small hill overlooking the city. For me, that was a very special night; it marked a very important moment in my life. From up above I could see the airplanes bombing the city and I could see the houses near ours crumbling. I thought that ours would most probably have been hit too and that the next morning our family would have to leave the city and find shelter in the mountains.

However, I could not leave the city. The Movement was already born, that is, there were already some of my first companions, and I could not abandon them. I felt a great anguish in my soul: how could I leave my family? I loved my parents very much and I was the only financial support for my family at that time. How could I watch them set off for

the mountains while I remained in the city? A sentence passed through my mind and gave me peace: "Love conquers all." I thought of the love of God and said to myself, "Love must overcome this difficulty, too."

At dawn I went to my father; "I belong to God," I told him, "and others follow me. I can't leave." He gave me his blessing which, under the circumstances, was rather exceptional.

I went off towards the city. It was six o'clock in the morning and all was silent. Around me there were uprooted trees, destruction and rubble. I looked for my companions and fortunately all of them were alive and unharmed. At first we stayed with one friend and then another until finally we were offered a little apartment with two and a half rooms, and that became the first "focolare house."

In this first phase of the Movement then you already had companions, but when did you have the first intuition of what was happening? Was it before you had any companions?

The first intuition that I had was in 1939. I had gone to Loreto for a convention of the Catholic Action and there I visited the little house which is said to be the house of the Holy Family in Nazareth. I didn't even have time though to think whether this really was the house of Nazareth or not. Upon entering it I was immediately overcome by a very strong sense of the divine. I stood against the wall and contemplated the thought of that little community which those walls had housed: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I imagined Mary's voice echoing throughout the room; I imagined Joseph's voice and above all, Jesus' voice. I even thought of Mary singing something to the baby Jesus. I was so moved by these thoughts that I cried and cried, something I don't usually do. And every day of the convention, ►

which lasted about ten days in all, while my companions would rest or take a break between sessions, I used to run to the little house and the same thing always happened. The sense of the supernatural almost overpowered me. On the last day, before leaving, I was standing at the back of the church (which contains the little house) and the thought passed through my mind that many would follow me in virginity.

I returned home and went back to my teaching job in a small village. I met the parish priest who was my confessor and, seeing how happy I was, he asked me: "Have you found your way?" "Yes," I answered. "Are you going to get married?" "No." "Will you remain celibate in the world?" "No." "Are you going to enter a convent?" "No," I replied, "it's a fourth way." But I myself did not yet know what this fourth way was.

It was there in Loreto that I had the idea that others would one day follow me.

Chiara, could you tell us something about your family, your early childhood?

My family was very serene, very united. I remember that I loved to study, even when I was small; I loved religion and received communion every day. I also used to spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. I remember remaining there, fascinated, before Jesus in the Eucharist.

My friends belonged to a group of Catholic students. I have memories of a very serene life. We were poor, and this did have a certain influence on my life, in that later on, as we began loving the poor people around us—the first focolarine began by loving Jesus first of all in those who were poor—I felt that I had a valuable experience behind me, because I knew what it meant to be poor. I felt that I could love them because I knew them.

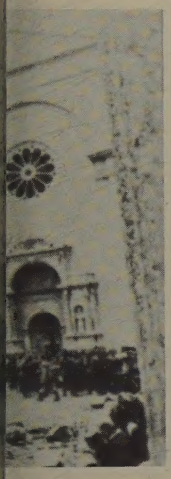
Your father was a printer then?

Yes, and my mother also worked in the printing business. In fact they met in a printing shop. Afterwards my father became a business man and following that we experienced ten years of real poverty.

Is there some episode in this first phase of your life, during your childhood, which is particularly linked with the love of God?

Yes, there is small episode which I don't give too much importance to, but which I can tell you about. When I used to go with the nuns for the adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament, I remember that I used to fix my eyes on Jesus in the Eucharist and would say to him, "You who created the sun which gives light and warmth, penetrate my soul with your light and your warmth." And I repeated this for the whole hour of adoration.

Later, at school, you could see that I had an inclination towards religion, towards the love of God because of this fact: I had to get good grades in order to receive a scholar-



"The war was really like a background to this inspiration I felt, so that I could say to my friends, 'Look, *all things are vanity*, everything passes. Only God remains'."

ship, but when it was a question of defending my religion, of defending God, nothing could keep me back. My philosophy professor was atheist and I was always jumping up to refute him and insist that what he was saying was not true.

And in the end?

I received an "A" in Philosophy.

Chiara, could you please tell us in a synthesis which are the cardinal points of your spirituality?

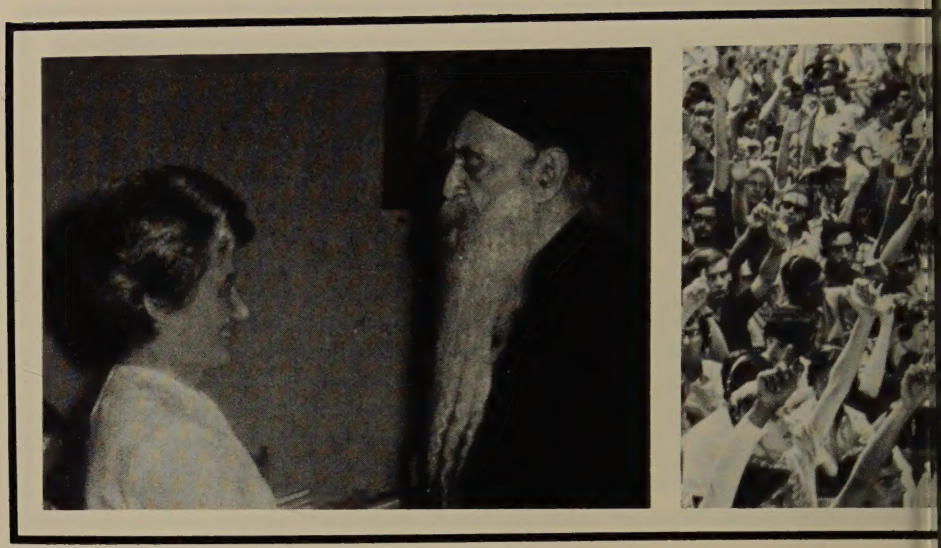
The war was like the background to a deep inspiration which I had in my soul. It was this: to choose God as the ideal of my life. All young people have ideals or dreams they live for, and I had this one and I wanted to communicate it to my companions. Now the war was causing almost everything to crumble, even people's ideals.

I remember one of my companions for example who was engaged to be married. Her ideal in life was to get married, but her fiance never came back from the war; therefore she could not fulfill her ideal. Besides my love for religion, I also had my studies as my ideal, but I couldn't go on with them because of the war. Then another friend of mine wanted to have a beautiful home, but it was destroyed by the bombs...

The war was really like a background to this inspiration I felt, so that I could say to my friends, "Look, 'all things are vanity', everything passes. Only God remains." God had manifested himself to us as love, God-Love, and we felt as if we were enveloped by his fatherly love. We felt as if before we had been living as orphans even if all of us came from good families. Now, instead, something was binding all of us and linking heaven and earth: God the Father. This idea of believing in the love of God, who turns all things to the good for those who love, was so strong in us that we decided that if we died (and that could very likely have happened either all together or at home or in the air raid shelter) we wanted to be buried in a common tomb, not with our names, but with the inscription "And we have believed in love." God-Love is the first point of our spirituality.

Naturally the second point is our answer to the love of God, and the Gospel helped us to understand this: "Not he who says Lord, Lord..." The love of God therefore was not a matter of feelings, of pietism; he who loves "does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

To love him means to do his will. This struck us as something so very new—that doing the will of God did not mean resigning oneself to his will. We knew that God loved us and therefore had a beautiful plan for each one of us. If we followed it our life would truly be a divine adventure. If we followed our own plan, life would be boring and insipid. We understood that in order to really live the will of God well we had to con-



centrate on living the present moment because the past was already gone and the future was not yet in our hands.

The war was raging around us; our shelter was far from safe and so we thought, "It would be good to know if there was one particular will of God that Jesus preferred, so that if we were to die and go before him we could say that at least in the last part of our lives we had tried to live for him and for his special desire." Here again the light of the Gospel indicated to us the commandment that Jesus had given just before he died. He had called it his own and new: "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." This then is another point of our spirituality, the new commandment which brings about the presence of Jesus in the midst.

One day I heard a priest speaking about Jesus' passion and he said that Jesus had suffered most of all when, on the cross, he had cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That priest had come to give communion to one of my friends who was sick. As soon as he left I gathered together all my friends and said, "We have only one life; it's worth it to spend it well. Let's spend it for Jesus' greatest suffering." This is another fundamental point of our spirituality.

Then, of course, there is the aspect of unity with the ecclesiastic hierarchy, because right from the beginning we had this sentence very clear: "He who listens to you listens to me."

Then there is also the "word of life." When someone does not know the twenty-six letters of the alphabet and the basics of grammar, then that person remains illiterate. We are Christians, but are "illiterate" if we do not have Jesus' way of thinking, his way of loving, his feelings. We felt very strongly the need to become Gospel minded.

Around 1960 the first contacts began between members of the Focolare Movement and members of other Christian traditions. Do you remember what incident pointed the way towards this ecumenical experience?

This also came about through circumstances. I was in Darmstadt, Germany with some focolarini, visiting the "Marienschwestern," a group of Lutheran sisters. They had asked me to tell them about our spirituality. Three Lutheran pastors, who were fairly well known and highly regarded, were also present. Their reaction to my talk was rather unexpected: "What, are Catholics living the Gospel?" From that moment on a very strong rapport was built with them. They immediately made a plan with my friends to bring this spirituality to other Lutheran groups, Lutheran brotherhoods and parishes. Now, all over Germany, the Movement is present among the Lutherans, too. And many prejudices have certainly fallen by the way... That was the starting point for our

Far left: Chiara Lubich with the late Patriarch Athenagoras: "There is always something that unites us with our brothers and sisters of different traditions."

Left: "The young people number in the hundreds of thousands."

ecumenical movement also among Orthodox, Anglicans and members of the Reformed Church.

In your opinion, which is the fastest way to reach the unity of all Christians?

We spoke about it many times with the late Patriarch Athenagoras. There is already something that unites us with our brothers and sisters of different traditions and this should be taken into great consideration. It is the reality of "Jesus in the midst" (cf. Mt. 18:20). Since these members of other Christian traditions are baptized, we can have Jesus present in our midst with them, we can love one another "as" he has loved us, ready to die for one another.

In 1966 the Gen Movement was born. How did it come about?

A small group of about 40 young women from Germany had a meeting at the International Center of our movement in Rocca di Papa, Italy. At that time they had an audience with the Holy Father, Paul VI. When he saw them he told them, "Go ahead!" These two words were a spark which immediately spread throughout the entire movement all over the world, and the Gen Movement came to life.

How many young people are there today in the Gen Movement?

The core group, those we could call the leaders, are around 28,000 thousand. There are then tens of thousands who belong to the movement at large.

Of all nationalities?

Yes, of all nationalities.

All together then, how many young people would you say belong to the Movement?

It's a little hard to say; the young people number in the hundreds of thousands. But to give you an example, one of our musical bands, the Gen Rosso which carries the spirit of the Gen through its music, has met and interested at least a half a million young people in these last years.

In your opinion Chiara, what do you think it is that attracts people to the Movement?

It is God. It is God who lives among its members, in those members who are united. It is God who attracts them.

I know that there are many married couples, married focolarini who animate the New Family group of the Focolare. What is their contribution to the Movement?

Their contribution is really very, very great because the couple is made up of two people to whom Jesus has addressed individually the words which he meant for everyone at least in a spiritual sense, "He who does not leave father, mother, wife, children, fields and possessions cannot be my disciple." These two people try to live the Gospel also under this aspect so that God has the first place in their lives. Then their family truly becomes a little church.

"We must say yes in the present moment. God does not ask more than this of us. Now, he is asking us to love him in this moment."

The New Humanity Movement seems to offer a very valid example of lay people committed to work with a new dimension of Church and laity.

The New Humanity Movement wants to bring the Gospel spirit into the world of science, the world of art, the world of education, the world of medicine, into all the various aspects of human endeavor, and not only among individuals but into all human structures as well.

You have written that God has a unique plan for each person, and that if we let him work he will make a masterpiece of our lives. But how can we make it to always say yes to the creative love of God?

By living the present moment. We must say yes in the present moment. God does not ask more than this of us. Now, he is asking us to love him in this moment. If we let some opportunities escape us and we do not love, it's enough to entrust it to the mercy of God and begin again immediately, without stopping. We don't have time to waste time.

But how can we understand what this unique plan for us is?

How can we understand this plan? We have to follow the path he has set out for us step by step. The plan is in heaven, not here on earth. This has been the experience of the Focolare Movement: the Architect is in heaven, and we have tried to follow him day by day, moment by moment.

Chiara, some people speak about you as if you were a saint. How do you see yourself?

If there is one thing I am certain of, it is that I am not a saint, and this is obvious. But that doesn't mean that I don't want to become one. It is written in fact "the will of God is your sanctification." Therefore it is the will of God for me, for you, for everyone.

Chiara, you have attracted thousands of men and women to your program of Christian life. How do you think it would be possible to gather all the people of the earth into one program for peace, for true progress towards peace?

I have only one answer: Jesus is peace. We have to have the courage to set aside all other methods, all other means, all other books and take up the Gospel; because it is God speaking there, God-Man. All other books are watered down. The Gospel instead has words of life; but they are not just words, they are a presence of God. And with the word of God, when it is lived and shared, what has been done in the Movement can be done in the whole world. It can be done. □

Twenty-three years of ecumenical dialogue of the Focolare Movement in Germany

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, we wanted to briefly re-examine the milestones of an ecumenical experience.

by ENZO MARIA FONDI

PREVIOUS PAGE: September 1981, Chiara Lubich and the Lutheran Bishop Dietzfelbinger at the Ecumenical Life Center in Ottmaring, in conversation. It was during this visit that the foundations for the Ecumencial School were laid.

That particular winter in Darmstadt

In the month of January, Darmstadt is just one of the many snow-covered cities of Germany. But in 1961 something was stirring under that cover of snow. It had been in the world for some time. Yet when it happened it took almost everybody by surprise.

I still remember the austere convent of the *Marienschwestern* (Sisters of Mary), a community of about seventy Lutheran nuns who lived their religious life with a particular dedication to the ideal of Christian unity. Two of these sisters from Darmstadt, in their long dark habit and white headdress participated in the Mariapolis[1] of 1957. Since then the entire community of Sisters had been praying for a meeting with Chiara Lubich and the "focolarini,"[2] a desire shared by a few Lutheran pastors as well.

In January 1961, Chiara was finally able to go to Darmstadt and speak to a large group of Lutherans about the goals of the Focolare Movement and its experience of life. She spoke with disarming loyalty and in no uncertain terms of our close ties to the Catholic hierarchy. The reaction of those present was one of gratitude and relief. It was clear from the very first moment that we were "Catholics," but it was also clear that there was something that deeply united us with our Lutheran friends.

We can state that this event marked the beginning of ecumenism in our Movement. Its charism was felt and accepted by our Lutheran brothers and sisters and opened the way to a dialogue which was to develop to unthought-of dimensions.

It was the first chapter of a long history, the seed of a common effort, based on reciprocal understanding and esteem, as well as mutual love. The will was there to overcome the obstacles caused by lack of knowledge.

In our post-Vatican II era this may not appear as such a noteworthy event. In those days, however, it was so. I recall how surprised our Lutheran friends were when they found out that Catholics, too, loved and lived the Gospel; and our own surprise at discovering the great spiritual riches of our friends. We were aware of the centuries of separation, of our different traditions. Yet everything seemed to be falling into place, or at least gave us the hope—not the illusion—that all would eventually fall into place.

One big stumbling block was our love for Mary, and the place she occupied in our hearts and in our Church. However, strange as it now seems, when

OPPOSITE PAGE: An overview of Ottmaring.
LEFT: Visitors to the Ecumenical Center.

Chiara spoke about her, about the mystery of her life at the side of Jesus from the Annunciation to her standing at the foot of the Cross, the response was very favorable. Everything in fact was deeply centered around the Word. The maternal figure of Mary cast no shadow on the Son. She acts, on the contrary, as a background to shed light on the person of Jesus, the protagonist.

The meeting in Darmstadt was not an isolated event. That same spring the small village of Violau (between Munich and Frankfurt) was the seat of the first Ecumenical Convention. Sixty Evangelical Lutherans, mostly members of the *Bruderschaften* (Brotherhood of Community Life), and a number of members of the Focolare Movement met in a climate of sincere fraternity. This was followed by conventions at Neresheim, at Alexandersbad and at Selbitz. Within a few months' time, several hundred Lutheran brothers, including pastors, missionaries and entire "fraternities," came to know the spirituality of the Movement. At each encounter we experienced the same deep, eager participation, the same surprise and joy at having found a common language—that of a life based on the Word.

In October 1961, a few of our friends made their first trip to Rome. Something that was deemed impossible had come true: after years of estrangement we found ourselves together in the heart of Christianity. The visit to the catacombs, the audience with Pope John XXIII and the meeting with Cardinal Bea were the highlights of that first Roman visit. In the following years these ecumenical trips of our Lutheran friends took place repeatedly during the week of Pentecost. Each time we experienced the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, light—together with the pain of our separation which prompted us to work for unity.

Of all the conventions held in Germany during those first years of dialogue, the most important, we feel, was the one of Nuremberg toward the end of 1964, when Chiara Lubich was invited to speak to a highly prominent group of Catholic priests and Lutheran pastors. The Second Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism which had just been published, gave a new, solid foundation to Chiara's message. Jesus' sentence according to St. Matthew, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst," as it had been understood and lived by the Focolare Movement, was now understood in all its ecclesial dimension and ecumenical implications. Considering the experience of the Focolare Movement, it was clear that the reality of the Risen Lord present among his ►

own could become the motivating impulse and specific characteristic of an authentic and fruitful ecumenism. Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans understood this as they listened to Chiara in Nuremberg. They found in the Gospel-based, communitarian spirituality of the Focolare, an incentive to seek new ways towards the fulfillment of unity.

A balance sheet

It is not easy to prepare a brief and comprehensive report of these twenty-three years of dialogue with the Christians of the Lutheran faith in Germany. One thing appears clear from the very beginning: the spirituality of the Movement affects Evangelical Lutherans in the same way as it affects Catholics. It gives them the same drive toward a spiritual renewal and commitment to live the new commandment of mutual love. And the fruits, too, are identical. Our Lutheran friends have also realized that this spirituality, based on the life of

the Gospel, helps them live more intensely within their own Church and give a more active contribution to its unity. They feel a new desire to partake regularly in the Eucharistic Supper, a practice that had long been neglected by many.

In Germany today there are 7,000 Lutherans, together with about 70,000 Catholics, who live or are in some way influenced by the spirituality of the Movement.

In 1983 the Focolare Movement participated for the first time in the Evangelical Kirchentag (Churchday)—a great manifestation similar to the Katholikentag (Catholic Day). The Kirchentag is held every two years for four days, and it is attended by over one hundred thousand people. In the two meetings held under the auspices of the Movement the contribution of the young people and of the Lutheran pastors were the most striking note. At the Katholikentag, where the Movement has been present for some years, the ecumenical experience has likewise been an element of major impact.

We can say, therefore, that the Focolare Movement in Germany has contributed in many ways to Ecumenism. In the Focolare Centers, in the "nuclei"[3] of the "volunteers," among the "gen," the family groups, Lutherans and Catholics live the same spirit while remaining faithful to their respective churches. Members of both churches can be found in all other branches of the Movement as well.

Dr. Johannes Hanselmann, Lutheran Bishop of Bavaria and Vice President of the Lutheran World Federation, had this to say in a recent interview for Vatican Radio: "I think that the Focolare Movement has a great deal to contribute towards the unity of Christians. There is no superficial overlooking or ignoring our confessional differences, but a serious attempt to live together what we have in common as received from Christ himself, while remaining faithful to our own Church."

"To live together." This is what we have been doing for fifteen years at the Ecumenical Center of Ottmaring. Chiara Lubich defined it as a Center bearing witness to a life lived together on the basis of what we have in common, and "a common ground favoring the encounter of individuals, groups and leaders of both churches."

Founded near Augsburg in 1968 with the blessing and encouragement of the local Catholic and Lutheran Bishops, Ottmaring now houses a community of 120, made up of adults, children, lay people and priests. The inhabitants of this Ecumenical center are Catholic members of the Focolare Movement and members of the two Lutheran Brotherhoods. The Center of Ottmaring is considered as one of the most concrete examples of ecumenical witness in Germany.

LEFT: The Ecumenical Life Center of Ottmaring: "Bearing witness to a life lived together on the basis of what we have in common."

The ecumenical school

The latest fruit of the aforementioned dialogue has been the creation of an "Ecumenical School." Visiting the Ottmaring Center in September 1981, Chiara Lubich had a long, cordial conversation with Bishop Dietzfelbinger, former President of the German Lutheran Federation and member of the mixed commission for the theological dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. On that occasion Chiara proposed an initiative she had already discussed with Bishop Joseph Stimpfle of Augsburg and Bishop Klaus Hemmerle of Aachen. It was a program of studies within the Focolare Movement for the purpose of deepening the knowledge of our Churches in the light of Lutheran dialogue. Bishop Dietzfelbinger promptly approved the project and promised to help realize it. When Chiara Lubich informed Bishop Hanselmann of this idea, she was told that this was exactly what was most needed at the moment. He had just returned from a meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Finland, where this very topic, namely the need for a more thorough formation of the faithful had been discussed.

Now the school has become a reality. During 1982/1983 there were twenty-six courses, held over weekends, attended by about seventy persons each, for a total of 1,500 attending. The novelty and success of the school lie in the new approach ►

in teaching, in the relationship created among the lecturers (Catholic and Lutheran Bishops and theologians) and in the new type of dialogue existing between students and professors.

After having each prepared their own theme, the lecturers send it on to all the others. The themes are then reviewed in a study session in which all participate. At the conclusion of the day each member has to be in agreement with the presentations of the others. This preparatory meeting which takes place in a climate of authentic fraternity and great freedom of spirit, has by now become one of the most valuable ecumenical experiences of the Focolare Movement in Germany.

The topics dealt with during the first year were the following: "The Common Roots of Our Faith" (Bishop Stimpfle); "The Protestant Reformation (Dr. Dietzfelbinger); "The Evolution of Reformation to the 19th Century" (Dieter Furst, Lutheran Pastor); "The Evolution of the Catholic Church up to Vatican II" (Hans Peter Heinz, Catholic professor of theology at the University of Augsburg); "The Birth and Development of the Ecumenical Movement" (Wienfried Hagemann, Catholic priest).

During the first course in early June 1982, all the lectures were videotaped for future class use with one or two assistant teachers acting as moderators and answering students' questions.

Even though the topics were by no means easy to assimilate, they were followed with great interest by all participants. They prompted lively question-and-answer periods afterward, particularly on the part of the young. These study sessions also stimulated the students' more serious reflections on their faith and enhanced their understanding and interest in ecumenism.

"Now the school has become a reality."

Each study group was composed of members of the Movement, young and adult, Catholic and Lutheran, people of all walks of life. Through mutual love they were able to maintain a constructive dialogue in the light of faith and of the presence of Christ—the same Teacher whom the lecturers themselves had endeavored to have in their midst.

November 19, 1983, marked the beginning of the second school year. The themes were again based on five topics of ecclesiological and ecumenical nature: "The Unity of the Church in a Trinitarian Perspective" (Bishop Stimpfle); "A Talk on the Faith and Doctrine of the Christian Churches" (Dr. Schmidt Clausen of Hannover, Lutheran Bishop, former secretary of the Lutheran World Federation); "The Bilateral Dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church" (Dr. Dietzfelbinger); "Vatican II—Lumen Gentium" (Bishop Hemmerle); "The Spirituality of the Focolare Movement and its Contribution to Ecumenism" (Bruna Tomasi, Director of the Focolare Movement in Germany).

Attended by 120 Focolare leaders, the opening of this session of the school was a particularly joyous occasion. Now, as

Catholic Bishop Klaus Hemmerle of Aachen, West Germany (left) and Lutheran Bishop Schmidt Clausen of Hannover, lecturers of the school.

twenty-three years ago, the fruits of the Spirit are a confirmation that we are moving in the right direction.

By bringing the theological dialogue on the cathechetical and pastoral level, the dialogue of charity emerges clearer and more tangible.

Speaking in Istanbul in 1967, Chiara Lubich said "We are convinced of one thing: that the greatest theologian is Jesus himself. If Jesus is in our midst (cf. Mt. 18:20), He is not only charity, he is also Truth. If we make every effort to have him always among us—seeking first that which unites us, as Pope John had said—little by little Jesus in our midst will shed light even on the theological differences which still separate us."

The experience of Ottmaring and of other ecumenical schools like the one for the Anglicans of the Focolare Movement in Great Britain, is an expression of our intense commitment to achieve the fullest possible unity. It is a confirmation that the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst "illuminates" the theological dialogue as well, guiding Christians in their search for the truth in charity. This has been quite clearly demonstrated already by the great effort to build closer bonds, made by the official theological communions created to further ecumenical dialogue.□

1) The summer gathering of the Focolare Movement. 2) See inside back cover. 3) See inside back cover.

Are you interested in the MARIAPOLIS?

For more information on the summer gatherings of the Focolare Movement contact the Focolare Center nearest you. (See inside back cover.)

"DO NOT BE AFRAID PINA, WE WILL DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER."

Pina De Vettori: thirty-five years of dedication in the Focolare Movement. Then news of an incurable illness. Death we face alone, yet mutual love can make it the most vital experience of life.

by ANNAMARIA PERICOLI

Pina left us on December 5, 1983. For six months she had been living intensely "her divine adventure" as she would call it. It was the discovery of a malignancy already in a very advanced stage, her coming face to face with death, her preparation for the encounter with God. Day after day he had filled her existence, yet, this encounter would still be something new and mysterious. For thirty-five years in the Focolare Movement she had given generously of herself to others, with that generosity that leads the individual to become both more human and humbler. Perhaps only now we realize how far ahead of us Pina was in this.

The day of that "encounter", for her, certainly, presented a commitment to live each remaining moment to the fullest, to immerse herself in the awe-inspiring experience which was now unfolding itself before her.

Pina had participated at the 'birth' of the first Focolare communities, when the Movement itself had not yet even been officially named. In 1946, three years after it began, she was present at a gathering in a town near Trent, Italy, called Rovereto. Chiara Lubich, the foundress of the movement had gone to Rovereto to speak of this new "life" which was spreading rapidly throughout the area, especially among young people.

That encounter proved to be a turning point in her life which up until then had been full of unanswered questions. Pina herself has written the experience of her early years. "I was born into a very Christian and a very poor family. My father had returned quite sick from the first world war and was unable to work. The weight of the family (we were eight children) fell upon my mother's shoulders. She was a woman of great faith and a tireless worker. I never heard her complain. At five o'clock in the morning she was already in church. She was happy to take on any kind of work."

Pina felt the impact of the division between the rich and the poor while she was still in grade school. "I was enchanted when they spoke about religion in school. When however I would see the little girl in the next desk eating chocolate, in her fur coat while I had only a piece of bread, I wondered why, after 2,000 years, adults had not been able to put into practice the law of love that Jesus had brought upon earth."

When Pina, still very young, left school and entered the working world, she saw that there, too, the poor were often treated unjustly and without respect. "The faith which I had acquired as a child began to waver as I faced the harshness of everyday life. I became disillusioned and questioned all the concepts that, as a child, I had readily accepted. New friends convinced me that the love Jesus had spoken of was a utopia, and that religion was 'the opium of the people...' Her friends belonged to that post-war generation which was no longer satisfied with passive acceptance of social injustice nor with an unconvincing vision of faith.

Pina, too, was caught up in the desire to live like everyone else; she was young, she was not going to worry about religious problems. "Little by little," Pina wrote, "I turned my back on God and left the Church."

Her mother noticed she was in a crisis and tried to help her: to no avail. "They were years in which I lived behind a mask. I hid my emptiness, desperation and solitude, under a smile but during the night I cried in dismay."

The war came, and with it the destructed of everything. The long hours in the air raid shelters raised a question even on the very meaning of life. Pina was unable to find in her faith, suppressed over the years, the answer she needed. It was too hard to turn back, anyway, no matter how painful the present was. "Who could ever rescue me from my pride?" she would write later.

One day the bombers came unexpectedly over the city and Pina, realizing she would never make it to the air raid shelter, ducked into a doorway. "I found myself in an old church which had been taken over by the Germans and was being used as a supply depot. I was alone. Looking around I noticed a large crucifix hanging on the wall. The hours passed. Staring at the crucifix I realized that my suffering was nothing com- ►

pared to the infinite suffering Jesus had undergone. 'Why those thorns? Why those nails? Why had people been so cruel to him?' An answer came from within me: 'For you, for you.' It was but a moment, but this discovery turned my life completely around. A prayer rose spontaneously from my heart: 'Help me, in the time that I have left, to love you... Come back and live among us as you did once before'."

"Whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me." Everything took on new meaning for Pina as she started to live this sentence.

The meeting in Rovereto, three years later "was like a generous answer to my prayer. There I found the religion of the early Christians, a living Church. I felt overwhelmed and I burst into tears. I was happy. I didn't want to waste any more time and I asked Chiara who was present with her first companions what I should do to be like them. 'Start with living this,' she answered me, 'Whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me'."

Everything took on new meaning for Pina. Whether at home, with her family or at work her program was always the same. To work for the cause of the poor or to alleviate the unjust treatment of workers had another value now: "You did it to me." Also the supervisor, however,a man with whom, up until then, she had usually disagreed, was a brother to love. One of her first experiences in this new life occurred when, keeping in mind this new choice she had made to love, she presented to her supervisor the suggested pay increases for the workers and, for the first time, they were immediately accepted.

Another experience proved fundamental as well. Perhaps because of a certain rigidity in her upbringing Pina found it difficult to believe in complete forgiveness. She wrote: "One day Chiara said to me, 'Don't look back anymore. The past no longer exists and you're wasting time. The present is what counts. It is as if Jesus were saying to you, 'Come to the theater, I already have the tickets,' and you answered, 'No, I don't want you to spend the money.' He has already spent the money, he has already paid, we have been redeemed. You will be like a door...and many will come to know our Ideal in life.' Therefore God loved me as I was, even with my limitations. I discovered that God was a Father. I felt his presence so strongly that I forgot whatever feelings I had had of being sort of fatherless when I was a child."

"No one should come our way in vain," was one of the mottos at the beginning of the Movement and it was meant to be lived to its extreme consequences. "Because You were forsaken Jesus" was the prayer repeated each morning which would help her to remember the goal: to be personally the rich fruit of Christ's cry of abandonment; a living response to his immense suffering which lives on in every person burdened with suffering, living in darkness... awaiting to experience that now his abandonment "can" be breached. Chiara chose with this in mind, a phrase from the Gospel for Pina to use as a mirror: "Have faith, I have won the world."

These were the first important steps of her thirty-four years of life in the Focolare Movement. Certainly its development, the enrichment of the spirituality, the important events which have marked its growth to full maturity in the Church, each of these events were lived also personally by each member of the Movement. Many of Pina's letters, which we still have today, tell us that this was true for her, too.

From Rovereto to Trent, to Milan to Florence, to Syracuse... wherever the divine adventure of living the Gospel in unity brought her, you could find Pina among the poorest, the outcasts of society, but also among the rich who were often living lonely and empty lives, among intellectuals with more or less enlightened knowledge. There are a thousand names, a thousand people; real people who, because of this unassuming woman, ready with a smile and tireless in her efforts to

help them, found a solution to their varied problems, could say that they found themselves once again because they had encountered the love of God.

The feeling of doubt and darkness, however, were not missing either from her experience. "Winning the world" within herself and outside of herself was only possible through faithfulness to Jesus on the cross, Jesus Forsaken.

In the past few years Pina had worked at a desk job. It was a job which involved greater responsibility but it pulled her out of the mainstream of activities involving people. It did not mean, however, that what she was doing was any less meaningful. There behind her desk, we always found her with the same smile, a person 'on her feet' always projected towards loving the other.

Then last June the terrible illness. Time was growing short. Her contacts especially with Chiara became always more vital and direct. It was clear that her experience would not lead to death, but to life. "Only suffering bears fruit, Pina," Chiara had written her. "Jesus Forsaken has been my teacher in this. I wanted to tell you because I know you will make it your life immediately. Be careful to live only the present moment. The future is in God's hands and he will reveal it to us moment by moment."

There were moments of doubt and uncertainty, of great pain but in everything, however, she recognized the love of God. The tumor spread throughout her body, "but in reality it's the kingdom of God which is spreading," Pina would say.

"Do not be afraid, Pina," Chiara had often reassurred her, "we will do everything together. You will see that it's just like going into a different room. There you will find Cesare and Radi who have just left us." Pina would then name off others of the Movement who have left this earth. "Imagine that you are going in front of the tabernacle. You will find youself in front of Jesus, in another way, yes, but always in front of him. It will be something wonderful. You leave here your body, your sufferings. Go with certainty. You are leaving, but you will still be helping us."

There, behind her desk,
we always found her with the same smile,
always projected towards
loving the other.

"I have understood," Pina told those who were near her, "that only suffering truly builds the Kingdom of God. We have to be ready to give our life for every neighbor we meet, loving each person without ulterior motives and allowing God to do the work. Our spiritual 'health' comes from our readiness to love, to 'make ourselves one' with our neighbor becoming 'all things to a all men' (cf.1 Cor. 9:22). Our 'wealth' is being able to love. I want to be like a bank from which anyone in need can withdraw."

She didn't want to lose even a moment of the precious time which each day brought her, and she offered her prayers and suffering for all the activities of the Movement throughout the world. From Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and other countries, where many of her companions from the beginning of the Movement now live, the communities of the Focolare tried to remain close to Pina with gratitude for her being that "bank" from which many graces had already been drawn.

The sickness reached its peak: each second seemed to contain something of the life which was about to open up to her. She was always filled with joy and concern for those around her. During the last days of her sickness, even the youngest members of the Movement wanted to be present there with Pina in some way and, after one of their international conventions, they wrote her: "As you are bringing to completion God's plan for you, we will love with a love like yours, those who today cry out their abandonment." □

Easter '84

Design by Paolo Scirpa

When Christ says: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?", his words are not only an expression of that abandonment which many times found expression in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and in particular in that Psalm 22 (21) from which come the words quoted. One can say that these words on abandonment are born at the level of that inseparable union of the Son with the Father, and are born because the Father "laid on him the iniquity of us all." They also foreshadow the words of Saint Paul: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin." Together with this horrible weight, *encompassing the "entire" evil of the turning away from God* which is contained in sin, Christ through the divine depth of his filial union with the Father, perceives in a humanly inexpressible way *this suffering which is the separation*, the rejection *by the Father*, the estrangement from God.
But precisely through this suffering he accomplishes the Redemption, and can say as he breathes his last: "It is finished."

Excerpt from the Apostolic Letter of
Pope John Paul II on
The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering
February 11, 1984

WORD OF LIFE

"So get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed."
(1 Cor. 5:7)

The sentence which we want to meditate upon and live this month, if we understand its meaning well, will fill our heart with joy and courage by shedding light on our vocation as Christians. In fact, the followers of Jesus are not always aware of their divine greatness, their distinguishing characteristic, the sublime dignity bestowed on them by God's love.

The sentence for this month is fascinating and can revitalize our often mediocre existence because it draws our attention to an immense treasure which we already possess but perhaps are unaware of.

Saint Paul took as his inspiration the passover festival for which the Mosaic Law prescribed that only unleavened bread should be used. From the very first day of Passover those who were celebrating the feast would go through their house from top to bottom and throw away every scrap of leavened bread. During Passover, in fact, the Jews remember and relive their extraordinary liberation from slavery in Egypt. The unleavened bread is a reminder of the haste with which they gathered everything together and fled during the night. Later, this bread also came to symbolize purity and integrity.

The Apostle sees in all of this the image of Easter. Just as the Israelites celebrated their Passover by throwing away the leavened bread, the Christians in Corinth, to whom he was writing, were to celebrate Easter, the new Passover, that is, their resurrection with Christ in baptism, by eliminating from their conduct the old "yeast"—any seed or trace of their old mentality, any inclination to evil which belonged to their former life style.

However, the feast which Paul is referring to, is not the one noted on the calendar. Instead, it is the communion with the Risen Lord that can take place in each of us every day; it is the passage, in every moment, from the slavery of sin to new life in Christ: a Passover which lasts our whole life long.

"So get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed."

"Unleavened as you are meant to be." Looking at this closely, we can see that on the one hand Paul advises us to get rid of the 'old yeast,' assuming therefore that it still exists in us. On the other hand he tells us that we should already be unleavened. This might astonish us but in reality these two statements are not contradictory. Because of our resurrection with Christ, and the life of grace which we have received from him, we can truly say that we are unleavened, that is, a new creation. Earthly passions undoubtedly no longer have the power to dominate us and to hold us in slavery as could have happened in the past.

It remains true however that even after our birth to new life, the roots of the 'old man', of old instincts, remain in us and, if we are not careful, they can crop up and lead us back to sin. For this reason we must be vigilant and work at uprooting them. Practically speaking, what Saint Paul wants to tell us in his writing is to see that our conduct corresponds to the new reality that we are; that in mortifying our passions, we let that new life which is already in us come forth, develop and grow to fullness.

"So get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed."

How can we live this word of life?

We must focus in on three things which are very important in our Christian life. First of all we must possess a great faith, which means the deep-rooted conviction that the grace of Jesus is much stronger than any inclination toward sin which may still be in us.

Secondly, we need to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to eliminating those tendencies toward sin, the roots of the vices, still present in us.

Thirdly, let us base this commitment on a boundless trust in the mercy of Jesus. This is the trust which leads us to begin again over and over, after every failure. Let's not delude ourselves though; it might take a long time to get rid of these roots. Jesus, however, will not judge us on the time it took us and on the results obtained, but on our readiness (this in fact presupposes humility and confidence in God) to begin again each time. Jesus will be the one to carry on the work of our sanctification in the measure in which we believe in his love.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

"PROVE IT WITH FACTS"

My mother-in-law has been very lonely and irritable since the death of her husband. She has moved five times in two and a half years. Recently she came back to New York for surgery and stayed with us. I felt I should invite her to live with us permanently. I knew that my husband would be peaceful and that she would receive good care. On the other hand, I was afraid I wouldn't get along with her and that such a step would result in too many demands of me. I thought that with a husband and four children I had more than I could handle already. I justified such thinking and consoled myself with the attitude that "after all, I am only the daughter-in-law." But I was not at peace.

With time it became even clearer to me that God was really asking me to extend the invitation. She was so lonely. My conversion was to say this yes, but I said it through tears because of all my fears. I couldn't let go completely; I had to have the last word. I told God that I would do it but that I wouldn't go home and just invite her to live with us; I would wait for a situation to present itself so that I could be sure that He was really speaking to me. I put it all aside and went back to living the present moment peacefully, without giving it another thought. Two weeks later, just before her operation, my mother-in-law called me into her room. She was sobbing, "I hope God takes me when I have the operation. I have become so lonely and unsettled; I don't want to be lonely and homeless anymore."

I felt a deep love for her. "Whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me," came to my mind. I could no longer resist. All fear vanished and my will became united to His will. I cried with her and felt her pain. My husband came in and we spoke asking her to come and live with us. She was so relieved that she went to bed peacefully. The next day she said, "I know I'm going to be fine now; I feel like a new person already."

I too was very peaceful with our decision. The surgery went well and the time came for her to actually move in. All my fears returned. I thought of "my time" again and the patience it would take to live with the new arrangements. Then I remembered the present moment.

The first step was to get her furniture and prepare a place for her in our home. We renovated three vacant rooms. It became a family project. Suddenly we were all putting ourselves and our schedules aside in order to love. We were tired from all the work, but the joy we shared was far greater than our fatigue. When my mother-in-law saw her beautiful new quarters, she cried. Our love really touched her deeply. As time passed I found myself having many opportunities to love more. Each month's "word of life" sustained me, moment by moment. I continued to "make myself one."[1] I went from garage sale to garage sale with her and back and forth to the doctor's office. I made visits to the cemetery and had prescriptions filled...

The more I depended on God, knowing that all this would have been impossible without him, the more I felt a freedom in my soul which was no longer controlled by fear.

One afternoon while I was doing my chores, the doctor called me in reference to my mother-in-law's Medicare payment. I relayed the message to her. My mother-in-law took out all her forms and booklets about her benefits and laid them in front of me with the bills from the various doctors. (I don't know the first thing about Medicare benefits and I didn't even want to know; I was anxious to get back to my work.) Because of some confusion the money to cover her bills wasn't being transferred.

I remembered the word of life: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh." The first step was to muster up the patience to listen to the end to her explanation and to read her booklets carefully. Then, I returned the doctor's call and told the nurse what I thought the problem could

have been. The nurse offered to help solve the problem. Thus all was settled, and I was able to find out what was wrong. In order to love to the end I not only explained everything to my mother-in-law but I also wrote everything down so she would have it for future reference. She was so relieved.

One evening while we were having tea together, she said something that hurt me very much. I felt betrayed. I argued with her and left in a huff. The word of life for this new month was haunting me. It read: "If you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit." The last line of the commentary summed it all up, "there is therefore only one thing to be done: repent and prove it with facts."

I was pushing the words aside. "After all, I always try to love," I thought. I felt justified. My ego put up a battle, but the best part of me won the fight. I returned to my mother-in-law's quarters, not knowing whether I would be rejected. When I apologized, my mother-in-law told me she was sorry too. I felt we had really forgiven each other. There was mutual love again. I felt the fruits of all the love during the months we had spent together.

When she came we were a family of six and my mother-in-law. Now we are a family of seven.

R.D.

1) Cf. 1 Cor. 9:22.

From the teacher's desk:

KEEPING THINGS "IN ORDER"

It looked like a hurricane hit it. My classroom, I mean. It was a mess! Who could have done it? "Certainly not **my** students," I thought. I am so strict with them. It must be that other class that shares my room.

Well, at this point, I decided to talk to the other teacher who shares the room with me. I thought that really all I had to do was to ask her "in a nice way" to please keep the room neat. I approached her and because she was a new teacher, I did not know quite how to begin. But I began. I explained "in friendly terms" how I expected the room to be. At the end of my "sermon," she agreed and we left on good terms.

Then it happened again. A mess! Writing on desks, papers on the floor and even my personal posters, maps, etc., damaged. This to me was the last straw. I thought that it was totally unfair. And what's more, I had a right to defend school property. I decided to make an appointment to see the vice-principal about it. I spoke with him and said that I wasn't there in order to accuse anyone nor to start an argument. I just wanted my room to be neater. He agreed to speak to the other teacher who uses the room when I do not and this statement appeased me somewhat.

Well, after that day with the vice-principal, things were much better; papers were no longer on the floor; things were in order and the desk writing was at a minimum. I felt now I could go ahead and "do my thing" as usual. But could I? I really felt uncomfortable. Yes, my room was clean but I felt there was something still not "put in order". And I knew exactly what that was. It was my relationship with my colleague; the one who shares the room with me. I really felt I had built a barrier between us now. This one small incident had really put us on "two different sides of the fence." If I was determined to be a builder of unity with all, then all meant **all**. I may have been justified in what I had done in a human sense but in reality I had destroyed a bond of trust and possible friendship. I immediately decided to approach her and apologize. I did not know what to say but I knew if I started, the words would come. And they did. It was a very beautiful moment because a bond of friendship was indeed built.

From that day on, our relationship has grown closer and closer. Today this teacher is one of my very best friends. I have learned a good lesson from this experience; messy classrooms will come and go but love will always remain.

G. G.

Youth and the Gospel

My grandmother

In September last year my grandmother fell, because of a mini-stroke, and broke her thigh and hip. Because of this she had to be hospitalized and needed an operation. She was a little frightened because this was the first time in her life that she ever needed an operation and she was 89.

After the operation she stayed comatose for about five days. I tried to visit her everyday because I knew that she needed support and I was hoping she would get better.

Within a week's time she was able to eat, sit in a chair and go out in the hall so we could give her a change of scenery. In the meantime, she was having more mini-strokes which would make her deaf, more bedbound, and they made it difficult for her to swallow. So I fed her the food which was substantial yet easy to swallow. Many of the times I went to see her she would be sleeping or she would be drowsy. When she was like this I would silently say a prayer. When she was awake I would say the Our Father and the Hail Mary aloud since I knew she did not have the strength to say them. As far back as I can remember my grandmother always said the Rosary, and I knew things hadn't changed for her now.

As my grandmother was getting sicker, at times looking as though she was going to die shortly, I became very sad and did not want to see her everyday. I knew inside, though, that it wasn't right not to visit her. I was thinking of myself, instead of thinking of my grandmother who needed someone at this time.

I knew I could love Jesus Forsaken because she was suffering, and I knew I had to come out of myself and love her without worrying. What she needed now was someone to love her and so I tried to do this the best I could.

When I talked to her about God she would give me a really beautiful smile. One time a friend of mine suggested to me that maybe I could help prepare her for heaven, so I did. I told her that every person in life is really searching for God and that soon maybe she would be seeing him face to face. "You are so lucky," I said. I told her that this suffering, it was true, was really a cross for her to bear, but look how much Jesus had suffered for us. He even humbled himself to become human, and he is God.

I realized in myself, too, that if Jesus could do this for all people then I could try and forget my own ego and do what he wants—to love my grandmother in the present moment and I knew that then she would feel peace within her soul.

About two weeks later the doctors decided to take her off all medication and the intravenous. She stopped eating and hardly had any strength at all. It was sad to see her this way, but I knew I had to love her without any limit, also in order to help my mother especially during this time.

Then I had to go out of town. I went to see her one last time before leaving, I stayed with her for about forty minutes and I even cried because I knew that she was going to die. I thought maybe she was suffering because there were tears in her eyes and she could not express how she felt. I held her hand and prayed while I stayed next to her. I knew that she knew I was there.

When I left the hospital I tried to really live the present moment and leave what was behind. I was quite upset by seeing my grandmother in this condition, but I knew I had to forget about myself because she was actually going to a much better place than she ever had while living on earth. I knew I would miss her but I also knew that I would be reunited with her in the future. Besides, she would be with God and isn't that what everyone really searches and longs for?

N.D.

IRENAEUS, the first "theologian"

In the series of our "reports" from among the Christians of the first centuries who follow the road of faith in that great historic experience, in this article we switch to the Church in Gaul, which has, in Irenaeus, not only a champion who witnesses to the faith to the point of martyrdom, but also a man of culture who knew how to defend the genuine tradition when it was confronted by the Gnostic heresy.

by SILVANO COLA

Reporting today from Lyons, in central Gaul, that little community of baptized Christians who are sustained and guided by Bishop Pontius, and stimulated by a young priest—originally from Smyrna — called Irenaeus; we have to admit that Christians do not have an easy life! Every day one can see the dust of infamous lies falling upon them; and they have to bear every sort of slander—slander based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations of religious practices and beliefs.

Recently, well-known Christians visiting the town were refused rooms by an innkeeper with the excuse that his rooms were all taken. Women, known to be Christians, going to the market have been turned away with harsh words; and there are cases of men and women being dragged away and stoned. People have been hired to stir up the crowds into demanding that the authorities condemn all Christians and now public opinion is being turned strongly against them.

The other day, to calm a disturbance, the city magistrates of Lyons had to intervene. They called on the Tribune in charge of the garrison and, in full agreement with him, called in the military. The Christians were arrested.

In the absence of the Roman Legate, who alone can administer the death sentence, a mock trial was held and the prisoners were flung into horrendous prisons to await the governor's return.

Bishop Pontius, too old to survive such treatment, died in prison: many others died of starvation.

The Roman Legate, on his return, read the transcripts of the trial and, without any further investigation, signed the death sentences.

Irenaeus, the priest, being away from the city at the time of the trial, rushed back to be present at the executions. Two of the leading Christians were condemned to be roasted alive on gridirons and their bodies thrown to the lions. The others were condemned to face the beasts in the amphitheater, for the entertainment of the general populace. Irenaeus kept his eyes closed to restrain the tears as he heard the voices of the martyrs calling out to one another to boost their spirits and strengthen one another: "Take courage everyone! We are nearly there! The sufferings of this world are nothing in comparison with what awaits us in the bosom of the Father!"

Despite his efforts tears furrowed the cheeks of Irenaeus as he prayed, "But why not me, O Lord? What do you want of me?"

The debate

The year is 177 A.D. In Rome the Philosopher-Emperor Marcus Aurelius sits on the Imperial throne. Pope Eleutherius wears the mantle of the Fisherman.

The Place: The Imperial Palace, overlooking the Forum in Rome.

The Subject: Philosophy versus Religion: Law versus Love. Law and Order versus the philosophy of Love? Could there be any debate? The Emperor Marcus Aurelius faced what could be the most crucial decision of his reign! Before him on the table lay two parchments, two requests. The first, a brief legal document from the Governor of Lyons, asking what line he should take with the Christians in his province. Maybe the Emperor had heard that the Christians martyred there had been innocent of the crimes of

"The year is 171 A.D. In Rome the Philosopher-Emperor Marcus Aurelius sits on the Imperial throne. Pope Eleutherius wears the mantle of the Fisherman."

which they had been accused: maybe not. The second letter, much longer, was from the celebrated Athenian philosopher, Athenagoras who begged him not to make rash decisions against the Christians at a time when, as the Greek philosopher wrote, "We can show that we are victims of undeserved accusations and suffering. This is contrary to the Law and to Reason. Could there, perhaps, exist some philosophers with souls so purified that they are able to love their enemies instead of hating them; of blessing those who revile them instead of ill-treating them; of praying for those who seek their lives? Well, Christians are capable of doing this!

"Among us, it is true, you may find those who are illiterate —uneducated people and simple laborers—who may not always be able to explain their belief in words, but their behavior shows how wise they are in the principles in which they believe!"

The standing of Athenagoras, and the power of his philosophy undoubtedly impressed the Philosopher-Emperor: but Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic. The Emperor was a realist, and all Empires need order to survive! To the Empire, and to the Emperor, the Christians were the cause of the disorder—whether the accusation were true or false—and the Empire must be seen to be strong. It was imperative that they should be punished—and the Emperor-philosopher promulgated the edict of persecution. For the Emperor, all the philosophizing about their supposed leader, the Christ, who was resurrected, was clear sentimentalism. Such theorizing was both unmanly and unscholarly...

The Emperor, following this astonishing illogicality to its logical conclusion, wrote to the Governor of Lyons: "Those who persist in declaring themselves to be Christians must be punished. Those who withdraw from their beliefs will be allowed to go free."

In Lyons no one denied their faith. As the ashes of the martyrs were being thrown into the Rhone, news of their faith, witnessed by the shedding of blood, travelled across the Alps and the Mediterranean to all the Churches in both the east and west. A letter, carried by special messengers, told of everything that had befallen the "servants of God who live in Lyons and Vienne."

Against the heresies

I have read the text of that letter which was brought by the priest Irenaeus to Pope Eleutherius. It is a very moving document; but, even so, one is left with the impression that despite these bloody events, the overriding preoccupation of the Church at Lyons is the preservation of the unity of their faith in the face of heresy.

Irenaeus, in addition to being a first-rate priest also possesses a brilliant brain, and despises all false ideas that may pollute the truth of the Gospel. He has written many books against the heresies that have threatened the Church in order to expose them and to put all true Christians on their guard. He is thought to be one of the foremost theologians of the Church today, if not *the* foremost. Above all he has the supreme gift of being able to take even ►

the most difficult of technical expressions and of expounding the whole truth of the Christian doctrine with the utmost clarity. Perhaps the most encouraging thing that he has written is this: "I would rather know nothing about anything; not even to understand the first thing about God's reason for creation: just to believe in God and to persevere in loving trust in Him. My only fear is of losing that love which is the very essence of human beings and is more important to me than being puffed up with knowledge. Yes, it is better to seek to know only Jesus, the Savior, the Son of God, and Him crucified; rather than to fall into sin because of subtle debate and brilliant discourses!"

It is fortunate that Irenaeus did not die a martyr in Lyons! It is clear that, for the moment, God has saved him so that he can make it quite clear to the world at large what the true Faith, for which his companions had given their life, should be.

The faith is but one

A "Symbol of the Faith," or "A Creed" most certainly exists among Christians. (A Creed is a statement of faith embodying certain fundamental characteristics of belief about God which ensures a true orthodoxy.) Often the Gnostics adulterate this with certain intellectual speculations—revealed only to a special elite—which separates the elect from all the others. Such "special knowledge" is an exotic fantasy. However the unity of the Faith, and therefore of the Church, is thereby threatened.

It is therefore more and more essential to identify those who have been anointed to proclaim and defend the Truth. As Irenaeus has written: "The Church, which is spreading daily to the ends of the earth, received from the Apostles and their disciples the Faith in One God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in it; and in Jesus Christ, the only son of God who became flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit who foretold the plan of salvation brought by Jesus our Lord...

"...This is the teaching which the Church received, and this is the Faith which, however many may or may not profess it, is guarded with jealous care, since it has its origins in one place and one place only. This faith is preached and taught and transmitted by the Church in such a way that she speaks with but one voice. The languages which are spoken around the world may be different, but the power of the Teaching is the same everywhere. Therefore, there is not one faith and one teaching taught in the Churches in the north, and another taught in those founded in the south, and yet another in the Church in Egypt or in Libya..."

This statement is fundamental, and thoroughly convincing. Jesus was born of Mary and that is a fact. Rome, then, may very well consider itself as being the cultural, political and military center of the world of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius: but Christians rightly see Bethlehem as the center of the whole earth: because it is there, in Palestine —Irenaeus says— that "the whole of humanity was born again, thanks to Jesus, who was born of Mary." Thus, if we are born again in Christ, then (following on from what Irenaeus said) Mary is the mother of all of humanity which has been reborn!

Remember the teachings

Let me clarify my own position for all those who turn to me to discover whether what I think, or what others say, of God and of the Truth revealed by Christ is true or false.

Up to now I have been satisfied with reciting "The Apostles' Creed," and I have also tried to love as Jesus loved. I must confess, though, that I have had to struggle very hard with myself to keep charity especially towards those who, according to me, have had no mercy for the sufferings of others, thinking especially of our martyrs. Now, thanks to Irenaeus, I have learned that if people who claim to have a "special knowledge" try to subvert my mind with false ideas, I have only to remember the teachings of St. Peter and St. Paul and of the other bishops united in them, since, again as Irenaeus wrote, "the Church, founded on the Apostles Peter and Paul, is the witness to and custodian of the Apostolic Tradition."

If this were not true, what would have spurred on such a man as Irenaeus to fight to maintain the unity of the faith among the Churches of the East and of the West, and then to return to Lyons where he knew that he would be put to death? □

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio. TX 78216

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

WASHINGTON, DC:
P.O. Box 4958
Washington, DC 20008

LOS ANGELES
P.O. Box 71701
Los Angeles, CA 90071

TORONTO:
P.O. Box 302 — Stn.T
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6B 4A3

Living City
is something special
SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Living City
is something special
SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Living City
is something special
SUBSCRIBE NOW!

For subscription, please use the enclosed envelope.

LIVING CITY
P.O. Box 126
JAMAICA, NEW YORK 11415

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 420
Long Island City, N.Y.

0185 21115L00000572
GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT
2400 RIDGE RD
BERKELEY,CA 94709

PRINTED IN U.S.A.